

Pinckney Island

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: G. B. Pardue



photo: David E. Goeke



photo: USFWS

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1975.
- Acres: 4,073 acres, approximately 2,700 acres of this is saltmarsh and tidal creeks.
- Four islands; Corn, Little Harry, Big Harry and Pinckney Island.
- Pinckney Island is the largest island and the only island open to the public.
- Pinckney Island NWR is one of seven different refuges comprising the Savannah Coastal Complex of Refuges.
- Pinckney Island is approximately 1200 acres.
- Open to the public in 1985.
- The refuge entrance is 1/2 mile west of Hilton Head Island, SC off of U.S Highway 278. The island lies between Skull Creek (the Intracoastal Waterway) and Mackay Creek. The island's northern tip faces Port Royal Sound.

Refuge History

- From 1736-1936 the island was owned by the Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Family and managed as a cotton plantation. Long staple sea island cotton was planted.
- Other crops included corn, lentils, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes and grains.
- From 1937 to 1975 the island was managed as a game preserve.
- In 1975 the refuge was donated to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Natural History

- Large concentrations of white ibis, herons and egrets occur on the refuge.
- Wading bird rookeries and osprey nests can be found on the island.

- Two of the island's freshwater ponds were ranked in the top twenty wading bird colony sites of the South Carolina Coastal Plain during 1989 and 1996.
- Waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors and neo-tropical migrants are commonly seen on the refuge.
- An active bald eagle nest is within 5 air miles of the refuge. Consequently, bald eagles are not an uncommon sight.
- Management focuses primarily on wading birds.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- One full time employee, refuge manager. Staffing needs are supplemented by Savannah Coastal Refuge staff.
- Approximately 330,000 visitors in 1997.
- Current budget (FY 98) funds for Pinckney Island Refuge are allocated from the Savannah Coastal Refuge's Budget.
- At present, no entrance fee collection system is in place on Pinckney. Revenues generated by the island are limited to hunt permit fees and tour group user fees. Total receipts for 1997 were approximately \$4,100.

Refuge Objectives

- To protect and provide habitat for endangered and threatened species.
- To provide and maintain habitat for migratory and resident birds that utilize and or nest annually on the refuge.
- To provide, enhance and maintain habitat for native wildlife.
- To promote wildlife interpretative and recreational opportunities.

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Management Tools

- One annual deer quota hunt.
- Prescribed burning.
- Water management for wading bird rookeries.
- Mechanical/chemical control.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking and biking trails.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- A 1-day deer hunt.

Calendar of Events

May: Migratory Bird Day.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week Greenwing Event.

November: annual deer hunt.

Questions and Answers

What is the best time to come to Pinckney?

Visits during spring are the most opportune time to view wildlife. During April, when wintering songbirds linger just prior to their spring migration and spring breeding birds are arriving, birdwatching on the refuge is excellent. Wading bird rookeries located in several of the island's freshwater ponds are noisy with activity, as herons and egrets prepare for the nesting season. Migrating flocks of shorebirds can also be seen foraging on tidal mudflats or in the high grass of the saltmarsh. Alligators are on the move or conspicuously soaking up spring rays. White-tailed deer are frequently encountered and observant visitors who scan the island's vegetation may even glimpse bucks whose newly grown antlers are still in velvet.

Are there alligators on Pinckney Island?

Yes, there are alligators in most every freshwater area on the refuge, and they may even be found crossing roads during springtime. Also, it is not uncommon to see alligators floating in the saltwaters of Mackay Creek, a navigable waterway that separates Pinckney Island from the South Carolina mainland.

Where might I see a Painted Bunting?

Painted buntings are one of the most easily spotted of Pinckney's breeding songbirds. The blue head, lime green back and red throat and belly of male Painted buntings is not easily mistaken for any other species. They are commonly observed in edge areas where the Live oak and Cabbage palm forests meet open grassy fields. Breeding males may sing from the cover of forested areas or from atop a snag out in the open. Both males and females have been seen in the meadow at Ibis Pond, foraging on the seeds of green grasses.

Is fishing allowed on Pinckney Island?

No, fishing is prohibited on the land portions of the refuge. The island is used exclusively "as a nature and forest preserve." However, saltwater fishing from a boat only is allowed in the surrounding waters of Skull and Mackay Creek. Boats must access these areas from the public boat ramp located across U.S. Highway 278 from the refuge entrance sign and are not allowed to come ashore or moor their boats at any other point on Pinckney Island. Shellfishing is also allowed in designated areas. Consult refuge brochures for regulations.

Are there many deer on Pinckney Island and do you allow hunting?

Exact numbers of deer on the island are not known, but each year the refuge holds a 1-day quota hunt to ensure that population numbers remain in balance with the surrounding habitat. Indices of herd health, such as tail and kidney fat, are examined at the hunt check station by the refuge biologist and indicate the need for any further management. The 1997 hunt resulted in a 1-day harvest of 42 deer.